

*Investigating the Social Context of a 5th Grade Classroom
to Foster Respect Among Students and Teachers*

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Background and Context

Audience: Teaching Professionals

My class contains twenty-one 5th grade students. Eleven students are boys, ten students are girls, and all students are either ten or eleven years old. The class is composed of one Asian-American female student, one Native-American male student, two Iranian-American male students, and seventeen Caucasian students. Within the classroom there is a wide range of ability and prior knowledge. Ours is one of two fifth grade classrooms at Ferguson Township Elementary School in the State College Area School District, and the teachers from both classrooms work together collaboratively in many areas of planning. The school at large has had a deep focus upon respect for self and others throughout the course of the year. We have had several school-wide assemblies in which we have discussed and encouraged the issue of respect. After one such assembly, we had our students sign respect contracts saying that they would work to respect themselves, others, and the entire school community. After discussing and signing the contracts as a whole group, we displayed these contracts on the hallway wall where they currently remain.

The majority of students in my class are able to remain on task throughout the school day. During recess, students play together and usually include others in their activities. However, there are also the occasional squabbles and disagreements. During classroom group work, most students are able to agree on ways to accomplish a task and to listen to each other's ideas and opinions. However, there are three students (all of whom are male) that frequently

argue with each other and disrupt the class. Two of these students, Matthew¹ and Don, often yell at one another and create discord among the rest of the students. The third student, Josh, is often disruptive and will throw objects in the room, disengage from class activities, and tease other students. These three students often act disrespectfully to teachers and to other students in a variety of contexts.

Many students have close friendships with other students in the class, and there are several “groups” of students that gravitate toward one another. The boys generally remain with the boys and the girls generally play with other girls. Occasionally, girls and boys will choose to work with one another. While a few students tend to avoid academic work and collaboration, the class is friendly as a whole and generally willing to work hard for success. Throughout the course of the year, we have implemented various group assignments, including small daily activities as well as long-term projects.

Questions

Main Question

How can I, as a teacher, cultivate respectful behavior between students who have difficulty showing respect to each other and to teachers?

Sub-Questions

- A. Why do students act disrespectfully?
- B. How long have specific students been acting disrespectfully?
- C. What encourages students to respond to one another positively?

¹ All names in this paper are pseudonyms.

- D. Why do students have difficulty agreeing with one another during group assignments?
- a. Do group assignments encourage or discourage appropriate social interaction?
 - b. How can we improve group assignments to foster positive engagement?
- E. Can I help to facilitate friendly interaction among students? How?
- F. Do students act similarly with each other during class time and during recess? How do they act during special classes such as physical education?
- G. How do students treat one another during lunch, at home, or when teachers are not present?

Rationale

While most of my students are quite respectful and congenial, the three students that struggle with respectfulness are the driving focus of my inquiry. I chose to focus my inquiry on respectful social behavior and interaction in order to benefit the students who have difficulty cooperating with others. For Matthew, relationship building seems close to impossible as his responses and reactions to other students in the classroom are so unpleasant. Upon conferencing with Matthew, he voiced awareness of his lack of friends and demonstrated clear remorse for lacking friendship. I hope that my inquiry will help me to help Matthew become more respectful to others so that he can develop friendships.

Don is an extremely gifted and intelligent student who seems to absorb information like a sponge. It is wonderful to see such learning take place in the classroom! However, during class, he frequently calls out without raising his hand, yells loudly, and interrupts teachers and other students as they talk. During recess, P.E., and class games, he demonstrates an extremely competitive spirit, which often manifests itself as poor sportsmanship and complaint. His high academic ability is extremely encouraging, but he often becomes disengaged from classroom

work due to boredom. Don is much more likely to succeed as a well-rounded individual if he is able to work and interact appropriately and respectfully with others. As noted in *Principles of Classroom Management*, "... respect, which was once given to adults because of their worldliness and expertise, has eroded (Levin & Nolan, 2007, p. 45)." I hope to help Don recognize the importance of demonstrating respect to all, regardless of his thoughts concerning others' "worldliness and expertise." Because I am a teacher, it is crucial to investigate ways of developing a classroom community that is supportive and beneficial to all students.

I believe that by conducting this research and investigating how classroom environments influence students, I will begin to expand upon my own teaching methods. Hopefully, I will begin to increase my own effectiveness as a teacher through this process and will learn how to help improve social interactions between students so that they will begin to feel more comfortable and needed at school. Demonstrating respect for others has been a primary focus in our school community at Ferguson, and rightly so. Not only is it beneficial for students to give respect to their teachers, but it is important for students to show respect for other students. I also hope to investigate how my respect for my students influences their reactions to the classroom environment.

Inquiry vs. Project

As a pre-service teacher, I still have a great deal to learn about the classroom and how to develop a learning environment that is supportive to all students. Quality environments extend beyond simple academic scaffolding and into the social lives of children. Since I began teaching, I have wondered how to foster an appropriate and respectful social environment so that all students can work collaboratively with one another. I want my students to become

contributing members of society, and that requires that they be able to work with others effectively and cooperatively. Proponents of student-directed classroom management theory emphasize the importance of preparing students to be active citizens in a democracy (Levin & Nolan, 2007, p. 92). By promoting respect in the classroom, we begin to prepare students for positive citizenship roles in the world.

At this early point in my career, I am still wondering how I can facilitate such positive interactions, citizenship, and behavior among students, and am eager to find ways of encouraging students to treat one another with respect and kindness. Rather than simply implementing a plan to “fix” an area of social lacking, I hope to develop strategies for encouraging social interaction by testing various methods in the classroom. Through the use of relevant research, classroom observation, and the questioning of experts in the fields of education and counseling, my inquiry has begun to take shape.

Inquiry Plan Description

I began investigating my inquiry by discussing the topic with my mentor, Sandra, and consulting my Professional Development Associates. Once my mentor and I had discussed the topic, we set up an appointment with Don’s parents to begin collecting data. Since Sandra and I had been concerned about Don’s lack of respect for his teachers and other students over the course of several months, it was necessary to inform his parents of our concerns—both to gain further insight into his actions outside of the classroom and to encourage them to foster respect in their child.

Following our meeting with Don’s parents, we set up an appointment with Matthew’s mother, Mrs. Thompson. Matthew’s father does not live with him, and his mother has recently

remarried. Upon speaking with Mrs. Thompson, she expressed deep concern for the welfare of her son and his actions in and out of school. She asked us many questions about how he responds to us, how he interacts with other students, and how he is succeeding academically. We asked her how he acts at home—both with homework and with other children. She mentioned that he has a cousin with whom he plays, but that cousin lives several states away and they do not see each other on a regular basis. Our meeting with Mrs. Thompson was helpful, but I was discouraged that subsequent communication with her became very difficult. While she occasionally visited our school to attend various events such as the book fair and our fifth grade Ho-Down party, she rarely responded to the emails that I sent her.

Aside from parent conferences, we implemented informal conferences with the students themselves. Matthew told us in confidence that there was only one other student in the school who had invited him over to play (a student in the other fifth grade class) in the past year—this student had invited Matthew to his birthday party. Matthew also admitted sadness at his lack of friendships, noting that he and another student, Andrew, used to be very close friends. From the interactions between Matthew and Andrew that I had observed, it seemed that Andrew was generally annoyed with Matthew, complaining about Matthew's actions on a regular basis. Matthew expressed disappointment that Andrew was shunning him, and Andrew expressed irritation for Matthew's argumentative and disrespectful behavior.

While conferencing with Josh's parents, we discussed his behaviors and how Josh continually disrespects our authority by calling out during class even though we repeatedly tell him to stop. We also learned during this conference that he had been lying to his parents about various assignments—demonstrating another severe lack of respect for both his parents and his teachers. More recently, Josh had been failing to turn in assignments, making excuses such as, "I

lost it,” or “I didn’t have my book.” My mentor became suspicious about these excuses, so she contacted his parents to investigate the problem. It turned out that he had been lying to us and that he actually had the resources available to him at home—with his parents encouraging him to complete his work! After this incident, his father suggested that Josh not be permitted to participate in the district-wide volleyball tournament for which he had been preparing for the past few months. My mentor informed Josh of this consequence for his actions. Since that time, Josh has been putting more effort into his work in order to regain our trust and the privilege of playing in the tournament. He was later permitted to participate in the tournament.

After gaining more information about these three students, I consulted our school counselor, Ms. Charles, for suggestions on how to encourage students to be respectful to one another in the classroom. We met to discuss various implementation strategies (See Appendix B). Ms. Charles was particularly helpful in gaining insights into Matthew’s behavior as she has been meeting with him for several of his elementary years. The two of them often eat lunch together, and she tries to encourage him to interact positively with other students in the class. When Ms. Charles and Matthew meet, she asks him why he acts the way that he does, why he thinks others respond to him the way that they do, and how he thinks he can improve his own actions so that others will want to be his friend. When he confided in her about his sadness regarding Andrew’s treatment of him, she suggested that the three of them (Ms. Charles, Matthew, and Andrew) all have lunch together to discuss the problem. The two boys were both willing to do so, and the process seems to have been fruitful. The two of them are somewhat friendlier to each other now.

Since my inquiry is limited to the interactions that take place in our school and classroom, I wanted to find out more about my students’ out of class activities and how they

interact socially beyond school doors and at home. In order to investigate this further, I sent home a parent survey asking about student extracurricular activities, friendships, and how the children talk about others from school. Half of the parents, ten to be exact, returned the survey. This survey was very helpful in discovering why some students have an easier time relating to others, and why others seem to struggle.

Community Building

Due to suggestions from Ms. Charles and a variety of reputable educational sources, we implemented a *Responsive Classroom* approach to facilitate cooperation among students in the classroom and to encourage whole-group team building. According to Paula Denton and Roxann Kriete in their co-authored book, *The First Six Weeks of School*, “There is a set of social skills that children need in order to be successful... socially.” Included in this set of skills are “cooperation, ... responsibility, ... and self control (2000, p. 14).” The Circle of Power and Respect (C.P.R.) is a bi-weekly, thirty-minute, whole-class, cooperative program that we have implemented based upon the *Responsive Classroom* model promoted by this book. We begin the activity by sitting in a circle. We then choose a greeting, and the students greet one another one by one. For example, a student will say, “Hello, Sarah, Happy Easter,” then turn to the student sitting on the other side and greet him or her. We require students to make eye contact with one another as they greet each other. I frequently have to remind students to do so, but I believe that they need to learn how to make eye contact if they are going to communicate with each other effectively.

After all students have been greeted, we select a topic about which students share. For example, students might tell funny stories that have happened to them, or they might share what their favorite flavor of ice cream is. All students have the opportunity to share, and all of the

other students must sit quietly and listen as every other student speaks. The purpose of implementing sharing into our group time is to help students to feel valued and like they have an important place in the classroom. Its second objective is to teach students how to be polite and respectful listeners as their classmates share.

After all students have shared, we engage in some type of cooperative game.

Cooperative games are activities in which every student in the class must participate, and they must all work together in order to accomplish the task. Often, students need to strategize with one another to devise a plan to solve a problem or carry out a task. The activities frequently require students to listen carefully while one of their classmates suggests solutions to the problem. These cooperative activities are intended to foster strategizing, cooperation, team building, and working together to achieve a common goal. Students often struggle with these activities because they shout suggestions to one another, but do not listen to the suggestions of others. Therefore, no one hears any one else, and cannot use each other's ideas to complete the purpose of the activity. It is only when students are willing to listen to each other and work together that they are able to achieve their goal.

Apart from C.P.R., another activity that I have implemented in order to encourage respectful and positive interaction between students is "Compliment Mornings." At the beginning of each day, I randomly select a student from the class to be our student of the morning. Then, as students walk in the room at the beginning of the day, they each write something nice to or about our chosen student of the morning. My mentor and I each write a note as well. After writing the notes, we give them to the student to read. He or she reads the notes and may keep them. The purpose of this activity, once again, is to help students see and realize that they are valued members of the classroom who have a special and meaningful place

in our classroom community. Writing the compliments is also intended help students demonstrate kindness and respect for one another, rather than focusing on their own selfish desires.

Grouping

Since my inquiry is centered upon fostering respect in all situations, not simply when students are engaged in games and fun activities, I wanted to implement ways to incorporate respect into academic work as well. We have found that Matthew, Don, and Josh have great difficulty getting along with one another whenever they are grouped together. Therefore, I have tried to group them with other students as often as possible. It seemed that it would be easier for them to demonstrate respect for other students in the class than for one another.

Beginning in February, we assigned our science class a project involving a specific class of invertebrates. The students were to research that type of invertebrate and find out various characteristics and species within that class. They were also to create a PowerPoint slideshow about their invertebrate class, and to present their slideshow and information to the entire 5th grade. Since this was a long-term and highly involved project for students, I wanted to give them some choice regarding which group of invertebrates they would study. Therefore, I presented my own slideshow to the students so that they could see an overview of each group of invertebrates. Since I wanted to foster respect among students, I believed that I should show them similar respect by allowing them some choice in their research material. According to Alfie Kohn, in his book *What to Look for in a Classroom*, "...if we want children to take responsibility for their own behavior we must first give them responsibility, and plenty of it (1998, p. 253)." In order to encourage such behavior and responsibility, I gave each student a card that said "I'd like to research...(pick at least 3)," and "Please don't make me research..."

(don't pick more than 3).” Then I presented my slideshow to students so that they could see a small portion of information about each class of animal. As I presented, students filled out the cards and turned them into me at the end of the period.

While I was unable to give all students their first choices, these cards allowed me to group students in such a way that they would be satisfied in some respect. For example, knowing the extent of Matthew's frustration with academics and social situations, I placed him in his number one choice topic. Since I was also aware of others' frustration with Matthew's behavior, I placed two other boys who also had this topic as their top choice. While I knew there would eventually be some conflict between Matthew and his group members, I thought it would be somewhat less stressful if the three of them were all studying a subject that highly interested them.

For Don, I selected a very different grouping approach. Once again, he was given his number one choice, but rather than placing him with boys, I placed him with one girl. Don's disrespectful behavior is manifested in multiple ways within our classroom, but he is more rambunctious and disrespectful when surrounded by other boys. This may be caused by the social interactions among boys, or perhaps some form of competition between them. Regardless, it seemed logical to place Don with a female student in an attempt to curb his disrespectful behavior toward others. Since Don is an extremely bright student, and therefore often becomes bored by our classroom activities, I placed him with Kaitlyn, who is similarly intelligent but who has a more positive attitude toward assigned schoolwork. Kaitlyn is also a very amicable and socially capable student in our class, and I believed that her influence on Don would be positive.

I chose to place Josh with two girls. Similar to Don, Josh's disrespectfulness is intensified when interacting with other boys. Since his type of disrespect for the class generally

includes loud and disruptive behavior coupled with disregard for academic assignments, I placed him with two very quiet, yet very dedicated and focused female students. The two of them have continually demonstrated great effort and improvement throughout the year, and I thought that their quiet natures would have a neutralizing effect on Josh and his inappropriate and disrespectful behaviors.

Grouping has played a vital role in the development of community since the beginning of the year. Since implementing my inquiry, I have become even more aware of the importance of grouping in the classroom and the repercussions it has on the way students relate to one another. We frequently change the seating arrangements in our classroom so that students will be able to look at the class from a new perspective and socialize with different students within our classroom. We have regrouped the class multiple times in order to investigate how student learning changes based on the interactions that they have with other students, and how it improves their respect for one another. Similar to siblings, students that are around one another for too long are more likely to argue with and annoy each other. In order to prevent students from becoming too disrespectful to one another, and to prevent them from becoming irritated by each other's behavior, we frequently reassign seating so that students are constantly sitting with different people.

While the aforementioned grouping methods are all carefully preplanned, it is not always feasible to group students ahead of time. For example, you may have multiple lessons in a given day that require students to work in partners or in small groups. However, I have found that when we allow students to select their own partners, a few students are always left out. Matthew is frequently in this group of "left-outs," and so he often feels disrespected and disliked by his peers. In an attempt to encourage him and any other student who is often excluded from group

work, I consulted other classroom teachers for suggestions on how to group students fairly and appropriately. A third grade teacher in our building explained that she had had similar problems with students being excluded from group tasks. Her solution to this problem was to use popsicle sticks with a student's name on each. When it came time to form student groups, she would simply draw out the names of the number of students she wanted in each group. She explained that there was rarely argument since students recognized this as a fair and random way of selecting partners.

After discussing this method with my mentor teacher, she agreed that it sounded like a valuable way to encourage students to work with different people for each assignment. We then proceeded to make our own grouping sticks and implemented their use in the classroom. While there are still occasional complaints and requests to work with their own partner choice, students have been generally accepting of the stick grouping method. It is an unthreatening form of grouping since it is very flexible and always changing, and the children cannot argue that the teachers intentionally placed them with someone that they dislike.

Data Collection

Meetings and Interviews

As stated in the previous section, I collected a great deal of data using multiple data collection strategies. Data collection took place over the course of the year, with a more intensive focus on Don, Matthew, and Josh beginning in January and continuing through the beginning of April. In order to gain further insights into the backgrounds of these three unique students, I met with my mentor and the students' parents to find out more about their social interactions outside of school hours. We asked these parents individual questions about their

children's behavior patterns at home. I took notes on what these parents had to say about their children and discussed the conferences with my mentor following our meetings.

Since professional resources are always valuable in promoting practical research, I gathered quality information about how to encourage acceptable social behavior and respect by meeting with our school counselor. I conducted a thirty-minute interview with Ms. Charles, asking her several questions related to helping individuals improve the quality of respect in their behavior as well as helping the class as a whole to become a more integrated and positive community unit. She went on to explain how she has been meeting with Matthew for the past several years and how it is important to allow him some free choices (Wiessmann, 2007, *interview*). Following my interview with Ms. Charles, she drafted a counseling summary for Matthew discussing his strengths, weaknesses, and the challenges he has faced over the past several years. This document allowed me to see her perception of Matthew this year, and it also provided me with a history of his past behaviors in previous grades. Ms. Charles has been working in partnership with Matthew and collaborating with Matthew's teachers and mother since he was in the first grade. For each school year, she wrote a brief paragraph explaining his progress and set backs, and how the school has worked collaboratively to help Matthew over this time.

Observations

While students were in school, I made careful running records of their interactions in various academic and social contexts. Such contexts included group academic work and cooperative learning, team sports and interactive activities during physical education, and student-lead games during recess and free time. I observed their behaviors and the way they responded to one another in each context. This allowed me to see what types of behaviors

elicited positive and negative responses from students. It also allowed me to see how much stimulation was required before students become upset, angry, or irritated, and react to one another disrespectfully. In order to implement any type of behavior modification plan, or in this case find ways to foster respectfulness among my students, it is important to glean enough information to pinpoint where the primary problems lie. By observing student behavior in multiple school situations, I was able to obtain a greater understanding of how and why students act disrespectfully.

Observing Matthew and Don in their physical education class was particularly helpful for this inquiry because they became partners for the activity that I was able to watch. Both boys tried to be partners with other students, but the other students chose not to work with either of them. Therefore, the two of them were the last two left without partners, and were forced to work together. The activity at hand was a mini-tennis lesson in which the students were told to balance their tennis rackets on ends, then quickly trade places with one another without allowing either tennis racket to fall over. The activity required cooperation between both parties, so Matthew and Don each had to help one another accomplish the goal. They tried several times before they were successful in completing the task. A follow-up activity that Matthew and Don were assigned was to hit the ball back and forth using their rackets. However, they were uncooperative with one another. Don persisted in hitting the ball over Matthew's head, despite Matthew's plea for him to stop, and Matthew did the same to Don. Eventually, the two of them became so angry with each other that they had to stop.

Parent Surveys

While I already had input from the parents of my three targeted students, I believed that the opinions and perceptions of all of my students' parents were valuable and necessary in

formulating a classroom environment in which all students are respected, respectful, and engaged. Therefore, I sent home a parent survey in our Friday Folders (See Appendix B). In this survey, I asked parents several questions about their child's social interactions and behaviors outside of class, whether students talk to their parents about social interactions within school, and whether parents were satisfied with the way that their children were treated in our classroom. I wondered how a child's outside stimuli would influence the way he or she would react to peers in a classroom setting. Since it is also a common stereotype that the "only child" tends to have more difficulty showing respect for other children, I also asked parents how many children live with them.

Student Surveys

In order to ensure that students themselves felt respected and valued in our classroom, I conducted a student survey to find out students' perceptions of various aspects of our social environment. The student survey can be found in Appendix D. I hoped that this survey would serve as both a gauge of students' perceptions of respect within the classroom, as well as a reflective tool for them to think about their own actions. Some of the questions were geared toward finding information about students' opinions and thoughts, and other questions aimed to help students reflect upon their own social behavior. I hoped that students would answer each question honestly and thoughtfully.

Most of the questions were quantitative (they would ask students to rate a particular subject on a scale of one to ten), and a few were qualitative (they would ask students to explain their thoughts and feelings, as well as provide suggestions for improving respect in the classroom.) All of the students were given the survey, but two did not return it to me. The students seemed to be very honest and forthcoming with their answers, which was helpful in a

variety of ways. Not only was I able to see what concerns the students had about the level of respect in the classroom, but I was also able to see how they perceived themselves with regards to respect. As a teacher, I see student behavior in a different light from the students, so it was helpful to see how the students rated themselves on how they show respect to others.

Data Analysis

Meetings and Interviews

Matthew

By interviewing several individuals who have worked closely with Matthew over the course of his school career, and by discussing respectful behavior with him, I have come to recognize more and more of the challenges he faces. He is an only child, which seems to have had a negative effect on his social behavior as has the lack of a male role model in his life. From reviewing his interactions with teachers from 1st through 4th grade, it appears that Matthew has had similar respect and behavior problems since first grade and has demonstrated little improvement. In Matthew's counseling summary, the counselor notes, "In first grade both his mother and teacher reported that Matthew was ... oppositional, insisting to do tasks his way, and refusing the follow directions...", "In third grade Matthew was referred... for behavior problems in class that included not following directions, problems with peers, and rapid behavior escalation... Matthew refused to admit when there had been a problem in class," "In fourth grade Matthew was referred for similar problems with peers, not following directions and disrespect for authority (Wiessmann, 2007, Counseling summary)." The counselor's report also mentions several instances of implementing behavior modification plans, with little success. While it is fair to say that Matthew has demonstrated little improvement in his regard for respect, the

external effort put forth by the counselor, this inquiry, and any other teachers has likely helped Matthew from falling further into his pattern of disrespect.

Don

Through discussion of Don's behavior, it became evident that Don's academic ability has often produced significant boredom in class. While boredom certainly does not warrant disrespectful responses, it certainly provides some insight on how to encourage Don to act respectfully. We have found that he tends to be more amicable when faced with greater academic challenges, so we have tried to differentiate instruction in such a way that will foster more positive responses. From our interview with Don and his parents, we also recognized his true remorse at his behavior and his own desire to stop it, even though he has trouble stopping it when he becomes frustrated with a situation.

Josh

Our communication with Josh's parents was more discouraging than encouraging. While we were aware that Josh frequently misses assignments, we were very disappointed at his dishonesty with us and with his parents. However, we found that when we addressed Josh about his dishonesty and informed him of the consequence for such disrespectful behavior (that he would not be able to participate in the volleyball tournament), he began to put more diligent effort into his schoolwork. He also began to demonstrate more respect for us as teachers by taking his work more seriously and being honest about completing assignments.

Observations

As soon as I saw that Don and Matthew were going to be working together in their P.E. class, I knew that there would be a conflict of wills eventually. The two of them aggravate one another, which escalates the problem. The cooperative racket activity was pleasant to watch because the two of them were truly trying to accomplish the same goal. However, their lack of communication with one another prevented them from being successful for the majority of their trials. Both students need to improve their communication and cooperation skills, which were two major goals we had in implementing the C.P.R. cooperative activities, and both students need to recognize the value of the other's contribution. Through this observation, I witnessed how these boys demonstrated a profound disregard for each other's abilities and strengths. Rather than collaborating with each other, they were attempting to complete the activity their "own" way, which prevented them from accomplishing the task.

Parent Surveys

After I sent home the parent survey, ten parents sent the survey back. It was fascinating to read their reactions to the social context of our classroom as well as to learn more about how the children interact outside of school. After carefully reading the parent responses to the survey, I converted their responses into table form. Placing "question" on the X axis, and "parent" on the Y axis, I represented how all parents responded to the survey questions. As indicated by this chart in Appendix C, the majority of students played team sports, and many of them were also involved in other community activities, such as scouts and church youth groups. However, Matthew's, Don's, and Josh's parents did not respond to the survey. All of the parents that did respond have very socially active children according to their surveys.

Only one parent indicated that his or her child felt left out of other students' activities, but approximately half of the parents said their children voiced concerns about other students in the classroom. Some examples of these concerns included gossiping, talking out of turn, loud and annoying distractions, rudeness, "picking on" others, and general misbehavior. All parents indicated that their children had many or several friends from school about whom they speak. This encouraged me because I want my students to feel accepted and valued by the other members of their class. All parents also noted that their children also have other friends outside of school, and most parents said that their children often have friends over to play.

For questions nine and ten, which asked parents whether they were satisfied with the way their child is treated and the way that their child treats others, the majority of parents were satisfied. And among those who were not fully satisfied, all but one responded that they were satisfied most of the time. The only parent that voiced any serious concerns was the mother of a student who said she was worried about her daughter gossiping about others. These responses were highly encouraging since so many parents were pleased with the social context of our classroom. The surveys indicate that, while there are the occasional disruptions and misbehavior, our class is generally appropriate and respectful. Either most parents are pleased with our community environment, or those who disapprove refused to return the survey.

Student Surveys

In the student survey, I asked students several questions about whether they felt respected by classmates and teachers, whether they are respectful toward classmates, and how they think the level of respect can be improved in our classroom. After collecting the surveys, I read each and compared them to one another. I then made a chart of student responses to each of the quantitative questions, which can be found in Appendix E. The questions are found on the X

axis, and the students are on the Y axis of the chart. After making the chart, I found the mean rating for each question (the responses of the class as a whole for each question, divided by the number of students), as well as the mean rating for each student (all of each student's responses added together, divided by the number of questions). Looking at the completed chart helped to give me an overall impression of the class' perception of respect, and reading the individual surveys provided insights into how particular children felt.

The data found in this survey was the most fascinating of all data that I collected. After finding each student's mean rating, I compared Matthew's, Don's, and Josh's ratings to those of all the other students. I was intrigued to see that their average ratings (7, 7.25, and 7.75 respectfully), were significantly lower than the average ratings of other students. Out of the 16 other students who submitted the survey, only two others had an average rating below 8 (one of whom was Andrew, the student that occasionally eats lunch with Matthew and the counselor).

An equally fascinating item gleaned from this survey was how students responded to question number five: "On a scale of 1-10, how respectful are your TEACHERS to you?" Every single student, with the exceptions of Matthew, Don, and Josh, responded with a rating of "10." Don and Josh rated teachers as an "8," and Matthew rated teachers as a "6." To question number one, which asked, "On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that you are respected enough by your classmates?", the three of them also rated this question lower than other students. Don rated this question "6," Josh rated this item "7," and Matthew gave it a rating of "4." The classroom mean response was "8.03". One of two conclusions can be drawn from this. Either students who act disrespectfully perceive themselves as disrespected, or students who act disrespectfully truly are more disrespected. Either option is plausible—the first is reasonable since disrespectful students

tend to get upset more easily than others. The second is also reasonable since disrespectful behavior leads to disrespectful responses to such behavior.

Claims and Supporting Evidence

Claim 1

Team and community building activities are crucial in fostering respectful classroom environments.

Evidence

A. Our class rated the Circle of Power and Respect an 8.37 when asked the question, “On a scale of 1-10, how much do you think C.P.R. helps our class to be respectful to each other?” They also rated C.P.R. as 9.42 when asked how much they like it.

B. During C.P.R., our students are thrilled to work together to achieve a common goal. During much of the day, students will disrespectfully talk regardless of the fact that other students are talking. However, when they have to complete a challenging task with one another, like the cooperative games we play in C.P.R., they are willing to work together and listen to one another’s ideas.

C. All of the parents that responded to the survey noted that their children are involved in either team or community activities outside of the classroom. These parents also happen to be the parents of the most respectful and socially adapted students in the class.

D. Three research studies (two year-long studies, and one two-year-long study) conducted by Dr. Steven Elliot comparing schools that use the *Responsive Classroom*

approach to schools that do not use the *Responsive Classroom* approach demonstrated that students in the *Responsive Classroom* environment had fewer behavior problems and were more socially adept (Rimm-Kaufman, 1996, p. 4-5).

Claim 2

Grouping decisions within the classroom can greatly influence whether students will respond respectfully or disrespectfully.

Evidence

A. We have found that using the random grouping sticks combats against complaints about work partners. Students seem to perceive the grouping method as fair, and when grouped with a partner that they would not have chosen, they do not view it as the teacher's "fault."

B. Placing students that are typically disrespectful with other students that generally are respectful helps to prevent disrespect and misbehavior from escalating. When two disrespectful students are placed together, arguments and conflict ensue.

C. When Matthew and Don were placed in the same group for P.E., they began to argue and yell at each other.

D. When Don was grouped with Kaitlyn for the invertebrate research, he displayed fewer poor behaviors than when he was grouped with students he disliked or students to whom he was a close friend.

Claim 3

Students who are disrespectful often perceive themselves as disrespected.

Evidence

A. On the student survey, Matthew, Don, and Josh all rated their teachers' respect for them below "10," ("6," "8," and "8," respectively) while all other students rated the teachers as "10."

B. On the student survey, Matthew, Don, and Josh rated their peers' respect for them below the class average. In response to the question, "On a scale of 1-10, do you feel that you are respected enough by your classmates?," Don responded with a "6," Josh responded with a "7," and Matthew responded "4." The class average rating for this item was an 8.03.

Claim 4

Students that feel disrespected are less likely to act respectfully.

Evidence

A. Matthew continually complains about the behavior of other students in the class. When they act in a way that makes him feel disrespected or disregarded, he will yell, argue, and refuse to cooperate with anyone, including teachers.

B. After a class with a special teacher in the building, Don was unable (or unwilling) to control his anger. He explained that this teacher had treated him unfairly. Following the interchange, he would not stop making "growling" noises as he stamped around the room.

C. According to Levin & Nolan in the first chapter of their book, “The single most important factor in determining the learning environment is teacher behavior.

Intentionally or unintentionally, teachers’ verbal and nonverbal behaviors influence student behaviors (2007, p. 3).” Therefore, if teachers are not acting respectfully to their students, students are much more likely to respond disrespectfully to teachers and to others in the classroom.

Conclusions

By conducting this inquiry, I have learned a great deal about myself as a social facilitator, children as important and valuable entities deserving respect and honor, and how to continue in developing appropriate, positive, and respectful social interactions among teachers and students. Throughout my career, I hope always to conduct my own behavior in a way that is respectful to students so that they will desire to demonstrate respect to me and to their classmates.

Since the behavior of the teacher influences the behavior and communication within a class so greatly, and since my disrespectful students feel more disrespected than other students, I will make a point to demonstrate respect for any struggling students. Whether these students are struggling academically, socially, emotionally, or in any other way, I will always strive to show the utmost respect for them so that they will recognize their value and worth within the classroom community. By giving respect to my students, they are encouraged to show greater respect to me as a teacher.

Similarly, I will implement cooperative activities that include all students so that they will recognize the importance of their own contributions to the school environment. Such

activities will include flexible academic grouping in order to promote social harmony and respect. By frequently adjusting cooperative learning groups, students will be exposed to a greater number of students, promoting social competence. Recreational team building games will also play an active role in my classroom to produce a group of students that are able to achieve a common goal by working together. Through the promotion of positive social interaction, I hope to enable students to become more active and inquiring learners. By demonstrating respect and kindness toward one another, students will begin to develop positive and effective citizenship skills.

New Wonderings

My inquiry did not answer all of the questions that I had hoped to answer. The most pressing wondering is still focused on the same concept—how can I foster respect among students who have been actively disrespectful towards teachers and other students for an extended period of time? Will respect ever take place? Will it take many more years before success occurs? Does the child have to desire to show respect before he or she will ever do so? Am I actually inhibiting student respect in the way that I teach? What role can parents play in the process of helping children to become more respectful? Is it possible for parents and teachers to work together to achieve such a goal? Would it be helpful to have parent teacher conferences more frequently to ensure that students are held accountable for their actions?

As I reflect on the entire process of this inquiry, I know that I have barely scratched the surface of this topic. Though I will never know all the answers, continued investigation, inquiry, trial and error, and genuine concern for the welfare of my students will help me in my quest to provide a caring and respectful school environment for all learners.

Appendix A (Notes from Interview with Counselor)

Team Building Suggestions

- Game: “Square the Rope”—structure it to help them to be successful. Rope must be long enough for the entire classroom. Tell them: “Can’t talk to each other and square the rope. Everyone must wind up inside of the rope.” Requires cooperation—requires following a leader; requires a leader. (Time it—the second time, it tends to end up a little longer because everyone gets to participate and feel included)
 - Discuss what was good and what wasn’t as good about the activity—did it take intellectual ability? What did it take? (Cooperation, being kind and considerate); Did anyone feel left out? How can you make everyone feel included in the activity? – All fosters communication
- Game: “Pass the Hula Hoop”—“needs to get from one side of my wrist to the other, but it can’t go over or under my body”
 - Variations—can’t touch the floor
 - Can’t touch anyone’s feet
- Game: Use carpet squares or various colors of construction paper on the floor. Only one way to get through the maze—and teacher has the key. Goal: to get everyone through the maze. Not allowed to talk. Everyone must participate... students walk through the maze. When they step on the maze, the teacher says “yes, that square is correct, or no that square is NOT correct.” Then, if it’s not correct, they have to leave the maze and start again.

Individual Attention—Poor behavior has a contagion

- Focus on being very careful about your own behaviors—specifically respectful behavior.
- Have students sit out when acting disrespectfully

Promote Positive Participation:

- If you give “arrogant” kids compliments for doing something that they’re already supposed to do, they can often get angry (for example—“good job acting well”)—give GROUP compliments like this (for example, “I’m glad to see that you’re all working well together” and pat Matthew on the back)
- Use some type of hand signal to mean to mean “listen to your friends” or “work together” or “think about what you’re doing”—this can be a specific signal just for Don or Matthew
- Matthew specifically: Ask kids what THEY think will help. (Side note: Matthew thinks that if he’s getting frustrated or angry, he can go and sit separately from the group)—LET HIM GO!!

Otherwise, he'll just get more upset. The more he can SELF-REGULATE, the better.

Promote Self-Regulation:

- Make sure to have the conversation with him that he CAN self-regulate and needs to do that: he can go to the desk outside of the classroom
- Whenever I need to talk to him, it is most helpful if I maintain a calm, collected voice... eg. "I know this is difficult, but try to do ... etc." Try to remain as calm as possible. BECAUSE The more that he feels that I am effected by it, the more likely he is to have trouble.
- Get OTHER children to give him feedback instead of the teacher. (Especially if he has blown-up at a peer)—this builds validity in the teacher's complaints about them
 - Ask student "How did that make YOU feel"
 - You want him to believe that you want the best for him—let him know that it doesn't just effect ME, but that it effects everyone around him
 - Have students give each other compliments
 - Helpful to hear feedback from the other students

*Don: DEFINITELY needs to hear from his peers about how he's acting and about how they feel about his actions. He likely has a bit more control over it. If he were to understand to the peer cost in his relationships with them, he is more likely to respond positively to them. Also, takes teachers out of the "bad guy" role.

Try not to process the problem in the moment, but rather afterwards. Maybe when you have some transition time, or when there's some extra time throughout the day. Don and Matthew both are more likely to be able to process it later after they have had some time to sit and cool off.

Appendix B (Parent Survey)

March 2, 2007

Dear Parents and Guardians,

For my Penn State seminar I am conducting a research project on appropriate social behavior in the classroom. If you are willing and able, please fill out and return the survey below (by way of your child) by Monday, March 19th. If there are any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, feel free to skip them. This research will help us to improve the school learning environment for your child! Please contact me if you have any questions: aed170@psu.edu

Thank you so much for participating!

Sincerely,

Miss Autumn Denniston, Intern

1. Does your child ever voice concerns about other students in our classroom? Explain.
2. Has your child ever complained about feeling left out of other students' activities? Explain.
3. Does your child have many friends from school that he or she talks about? Elaborate.
4. Does your child have many playmates outside of school?
5. Does your child frequently have friends come to play at your house?
6. How many children (total) currently live in your house?

7. Is your child active in any type of social, service, or team activities outside of school (sports, dance, 4H, teams, scouts, clubs, religious organizations, etc.)? If so, what?

8. How does your child spend the majority of his or her after school time? (Examples: playing outside with friends, reading, doing homework, playing video games, doing sports, etc.)

9. Are you satisfied with the way that your child is treated by other students in the classroom? Explain.

10. Are you satisfied with the way your child treats other students in the classroom? Explain.

11. Do you have any other comments, suggestions, questions, or concerns about our classroom social environment?

Appendix C (Parent Survey Results)

	<u>Question</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Parent												
1		Yes— gossip	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	Sports	Playing with friends	Most of the time	Worry about gossip	No
2		No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	Sports	Plays outside with friends, Video Games	Yes	Yes	No
3		–	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	Sports	Homework, Friends, Sports, Video games, Reading	Most of the time	Yes	No
4		No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	–	–	–	–	–
5		No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	Sports, YMCA	Play outside, Video games, Reading, Friends	Yes	Yes	–
6		No	No	Yes	Yes	Some times	2	4H, Girl Scouts	Homework, Computer, Play outside	Yes	Yes	–
7		No	No	Yes	Yes	Some times	3	Yes	Homework, Playing with friends, Reading, Video games, Sports	Yes	Yes	No
8		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	2	Ballet, Girl Scouts, Choir, Band	Homework, Piano, Violin, Horseback riding, Lessons	Most of the time	Yes	Rude beh. should not be allowed
9		Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	Sports, IM, Church Group	Playing outside with friends, Sports	Yes	Yes	Love it!
10		Yes— excess talking, poor beh.	No	Yes	Yes	Some times	2	–	–	–	–	–

Appendix D (Student Survey)

Name: _____

Respect Survey

Fill out this survey by circling the number that fits the best and by explaining your opinion. Be honest!

1. On a scale of 1- 10, do you feel that you are respected enough by your classmates?

Not Respected at All

Very Respected

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. How could your classmates show you more respect?

3. On a scale of 1- 10, how respectful are you to your classmates?

Not Respectful at All

Very Respectful

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. How can you try to be more respectful to your classmates?

5. On a scale of 1- 10, how respectful are your TEACHERS to you?

Not Respectful at All

Very Respectful

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. What can your teachers do to show you more respect?

7. On a scale of 1- 10, how much do you like C.P.R.?

I Hate It!

I Love It!

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you think C.P.R. helps our class to be respectful to each other?

It Doesn't Help at All

It Helps a Lot

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you like GIVING the hand-written compliments to your classmates?

I Hate It!

I Love It!

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you like GETTING the compliments from your classmates? (If you haven't gotten yours yet, you can say how much you think you would like it.)

I Think It's Dumb!

I Think It's Awesome!

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you think the compliments help our class to be more respectful to each other?

They Don't Help at All

They Help a Lot

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appendix E (Student Survey Results)

	<u>Question</u>	1	3	5	7	8	9	10	11		Avg.
<u>Student</u>											
Kaitlyn		8	9	10	8	9	7	9	8		8.5
Matthew		4	6	8	8	7	8	7	6		7
#3		10	9	10	10	7	6	7	5		8.38
#4		8	9	10	9	9	9	8	8		8.75
Andrew		8	7	10	10	7	5	9	7		7.88
#6		8.5	8.5	10	10	9	9	9.5	9.5		9.25
#7		9	9	10	10	9	9	10	9		9.38
#8		8	10	10	10	9	10	10	10		9.63
#9		7	6	10	10	6	7	4	6		7
#10		8	8	10	10	8	10	9	8		8.88
Josh		7	4	6	8	7	7	8	8		7.25
#12		9	10	10	10	8	10	10	10		9.63
#13		10	9	10	10	10	10	10	9		9.75
#14		8	9	10	7	8	8	9	6		8.13
#15		7	9	10	10	9	8	6	7		8.25
#16		8	9	10	10	9	8	5	6		8.25
#17		9	9	10	9	8	7	8	7		8.38
#18		10	9	10	10	10	10	10	10		9.88
Don		6	7	8	10	10	7	7	7		7.75
Average		8.03	8.24	9.58	9.42	8.37	8.16	8.18	7.71		8.52

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